THE LAKE OF GENNESARET

C. BAKER

OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

TEACHING ON

THE LAKE OF GENNESARET

Six Discourses Suitable for Family Reading

By CHARLES BAKER, M.A. Oxon

VICAR OF APPLESHAW, HANTS

RIVINGTONS

London, Oxford, and Cambridge

1868

PREFACE.

THIS little work is intended to help ordinary Bible readers to form some definite notion of our Lord's teaching, and the circumstances which lead to such lessons.

Having observed that many persons have a very confused idea of the events in the life of Jesus, it has occurred to me that a clearer view might be obtained by localizing some of the principal events.

The reader is recommended to consult the passages of Scripture referred to at the beginning of each discourse.

I have written for a Village Congregation, with no opportunities of consulting books, and therefore make no pretensions to critical research, but have simply endeavoured to assist

the devotional reflection, and influence the practical conduct, of my hearers.

May the Holy Spirit cause such results in those who read these Discourses!

C. B.

I.

S. Matt. iv. 18—22.
S. Mark i. 16—20.
S. Luke v. 1—11.

Very remarkable were the doings of our Saviour on and near this Sea of Galilee, known also as the Sea of Tiberias and the Lake of Gennesaret. Through this lake run the sacred waters of the Jordan, which river continues its course through a desert and falls into the Dead Sea.

It was a Jewish saying, that God loved the Sea of Galilee more than all the other seas. The wonderful fertility of the country about it may have caused this saying; for plants and fruits that naturally require different temperatures and conditions of atmosphere will there flourish luxuriantly, as if God so loved that district as to endue the climate with contradictory qualities. Figs, grapes, nuts, palms, and olives grow in perfection: the lake supplies fish of a kind not to be found any where else; nor are flowers wanting to grace the scene.

The land on the western side of the lake is called the land of Gennesaret; that on the eastern side, the country of the Gergesenes; and what is called Galilee of the Gentiles lies on the north.

In the distribution of the country among the twelve tribes, this favoured tract fell to the share of—

1. Zebulun, who had the land on the west of the lake; of

2. Naphtali, who lived north of it; and

3. Manasseh, who occupied the land on the east of the lake.

Remembering the numerous privileges and opportunities granted by our Saviour in this neighbourhood, we must acknowledge that Isaiah had good reason to sing, "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali . . . . by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the Gentiles, the people that walked in darkness have seen a great light[1]." This prophecy was spoken to comfort the inhabitants; for they were the first victims of the Assyrian invasion[2], and are promised as a compensation the best share of Christ's society.

On the north-west of the lake stood Caper-

[1] Isa. ix. 1, 2. [2] 2 Kings xv. 29.

naum, which is called the Lord's "own city;" for there Jesus principally lived. In the synagogue, probably built by a Roman centurion[3], Jesus often taught. The office of Publican, who collected dues from those crossing the lake, appears to have been held by Levi or Matthew[4]. The inhabitants received little benefit from the advantages they enjoyed; therefore was the city doomed by our Lord: "Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto Heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day[5]." Of this once flourishing town only a few fishing cottages remain.

Two Capernaites have been already mentioned as noble examples of faith and obedience. Matthew, the Publican, who gave up his lucrative trade to follow Jesus; and the Roman centurion, who had more faith and humility than any one else who saw Jesus[6]. Learn, my brethren, however bad an example surrounds you, however few your opportunities, that God will give to the faithful and humble sufficient grace whereby they may witness a good confession.

[3] S. Luke vii. 5.
[4] S. Matt. ix. 9.
[5] S. Matt. xi. 23.
[6] S. Matt. viii. 10.

Woes are uttered against two other cities on the Lake of Gennesaret, Chorazin and Bethsaida[7]. In this latter town resided Peter, Andrew, and Philip[8]. The word Bethsaida means "place of fishing." It is on the north-east corner of the lake, just where the Jordan runs into it. Between these two cities is a mountain, where it is thought that Jesus preached His sermon on the Mount, and whither He retired for prayer on the night before His ordination of the twelve Apostles[9].

In a desert south of Bethsaida, five thousand men were miraculously fed by our Lord with five barley loaves and two fishes[1]. Continuing southward on the east side of the lake, we pass through the country of the Gergesenes, where two men possessed with devils were cured[2]. By crossing the lake, we shall reach Magdala, some five miles south of Capernaum. Here was the residence of S. Mary Magdalen[3]. We might enlarge on all these places; but you will see, by the allusions that have been made, how famous and how blessed was the country about the Lake of Gennesaret. Nor can we fail to

[7] S. Matt. xi. 21.
[8] S. John i. 44.
[9] S. Luke vi. 12, 13.
[1] S. Luke ix. 10.
[2] S. Matt. viii. 20.
[3] S. Luke viii. 2.

draw much instruction from the history of Jesus on the lake itself. The Saviour's first appearance there, as recorded by the Evangelists, resulted in the call of Andrew and Simon Peter, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Andrew had been a disciple of John Baptist, and had heard his master's testimony to Christ; he had visited the Lord Jesus in His own home, and had introduced to Him his brother, Simon Peter[4]. The two returned to their occupation of fishermen, but gave up this trade when Jesus came to them by the Lake. A wonderful miracle, related by S. Luke, but not mentioned by SS. Matthew and Mark, had convinced them that John's testimony was true.

It was early morning; the night had been spent on the Lake as usual, but they had not prospered—they had caught nothing. They were washing their nets, but, at the Saviour's request, gladly gave Him the use of their boat, from which He might address the people that lined the shore. Wet, cold, hungry, tired, out of spirits, as Peter was, he nevertheless is ready to do what he can for the progress of religious knowledge, himself listens to the news of rest for the weary, and comfort for the broken-hearted. Having concluded His discourse,

[4] S. John i. 35—41.

Jesus showed the reality of His human sympathy, that He felt for the bodies as well as the souls of His people. When we wilfully dishonour the body by filth, impurity, want, or excess, we spoil one of God's works. Simon is directed to launch out into the deep, and let down his nets for a draught. It was not a likely hour for fishing, but Simon obeys, and his net encloses a great multitude of fishes. Thus the simple act of obedience to Christ's word accomplishes more than all their skill and toil. And surely, in their work of catching souls—fishing for men—the Apostles found this ever to be the case. It pleased God by the foolishness of the preaching[5] of men, weak and unlearned, but carrying Christ's commission, to stir the hearts and excite the faith of many, who, being admitted into membership with Christ by Baptism, found that simple water brought to the earnest believer the witness of the Holy Spirit that he was now a child of God[6]—that the Lord's Supper renewed in him from time to time spiritual strength, and made closer the bonds of his union with Jesus. He found, too, that though the God he worshipped was unseen, except by His works, yet that his prayers were heard and accepted; that the

[5] 1 Cor. i. 21. [6] Rom. viii. 16.

Divine Presence was felt; that, as temptation grew stronger, or his outer man grew weaker, so did grace increase, and the inner man wax more mighty. Yes, my Christian friends, the world may count our religion to be folly: they may scoff at sacraments, church ordinances, prayer, the Word read and preached; they may think the preaching of the Cross to be foolishness; but the true believer knows that the foolishness of God is wiser than men—that God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise[7]; that He often hides these things from the wise and prudent, and reveals them to babes[8]. It is not man's wisdom, labour, or skill, but man's *obedience*, which brings him true prosperity: it was not Peter's efforts, but his yielding to Christ's power working under unlikely circumstances, that filled the net with fishes. And great was their number—so great that *the net brake*. The Church is not perfect: she is militant, warring against sin and error, striving after perfection. These efforts often cause divisions. For different minds see more clearly different parts of the truth: men exalt unduly that part of the faith which commends itself most to their minds, and depreciate or ignore the other part.

[7] 1 Cor. i. 25—28. [8] S. Matt. xi. 25.

One is deeply impressed with the necessity of bodily worship, and loses sight of the importance of spiritual worship; another worships in spirit, but thinks God should not be honoured with his body; one trusts to the sacraments; another seeks the inward grace, and is careless about the appointed means; one hopes for justification by faith, another trusts to his works. In the efforts to exalt parts of the truth, parts important indeed, but not the whole, dissensions arise, and *the net breaks.* The sight of Christians living in disunion and discord, the offences that arise, the sins committed, weaken the Church. The exertions of individuals are directed for the good of their party, not for the Holy Catholic Church. Truly she is in danger, the ship begins to sink. What course should then be taken? What remedy does the present history point out? "They beckoned unto their partners which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them[9]. "In the multitude of counsellors there is safety[1]. It is natural to man to look for human sympathy and aid. It was the want of this that intensified our Lord's agony in the garden[2]; that caused the great prophet Elijah to pray for

[9] S. Luke v. 7. [1] Prov. xi. 14. [2] S. Matt. xxvi. 40.

death[3]; that caused Paul to beg Timothy to visit him in his last imprisonment[4]. Many can work, spend, and be spent gladly for the Lord's sake; but solitary labour becomes unbearable. We long to take counsel with the seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal, to feel that others sympathize with us in our cares and anxieties, to hear the kindly voice of encouragement, and to feel at hand the generous heart which appreciates our difficulties and exertions.

Even now our Church has afforded an instance of this. Our holy faith is attacked; there is danger to the Church from within and from without. The meek and lowly Jesus is again put to open shame, the Rock on which man's hopes are founded rudely shaken. The fathers of our Church have beckoned to their partners which were in the other ship to come and help them: they have invited Bishops from other parts of our Empire and from America to take counsel with them in the present crisis[5]. Undoubtedly this course is prudent and Scriptural. Let us, my brethren, hope that, with their united efforts, the breaking net and sinking ship may fulfil their office, and bring multitudes of souls to the land.

[3] 1 Kings xix. 4—10. [4] 2 Tim. iv. 9—11.
[5]. The Lambeth Conference of Bishops.

And if it should please God to prosper their undertakings, and to grant that His Church may joyfully serve Him in godly quietness, let us see that we are not exalted, but made sensible of our own unworthiness of such favours. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord[6]." He knew his own weakness, he saw Christ's power; he knew his own sinfulness, he saw Christ's loving mercy; such a draught of fish was wealth to him. Oh, that we could feel how powerless we are in obtaining any good for our souls or bodies! For if we felt that it was only by God's Providence that we obtain success in life, or improve our characters, we should live so as to be, in some degree, worthy of His blessing. Worldly prosperity would not harden our hearts, spiritual mercies would not inflate our pride. We should grow more eager for treasure laid up in Heaven, more anxious to make friends for eternity. There was wealth for the four fishermen, there was a turn of luck; but they, feeling their own sinfulness, sensible of Christ's power, touched by His love, forsook all and followed Him!

[6] S. Luke v. 8.

II.

S. Matt. viii. 23—27.
S. Mark iv. 35—41.
S. Luke viii. 22—25.

The Evangelists are by no means exact in the order in which they relate events in the life of our Lord. The stilling the tempest on the Lake of Gennesaret appears to have taken place after the parables which are given in S. Matt. xiii. In this order the history is given by SS. Mark and Luke. Our blessed Lord, then, had entered into a ship in order to address the multitude on the beach, just as He had done at the first miraculous draught of fishes. His address consisted of the parables of the Sower, the Tares, the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl of Great Price, the Net cast into the Sea. Some of these parables, and the explanations of all, appear to have been addressed to the disciples alone [1].

[1] S. Mark iv. 34.

In the parable of the Sower, we learn that God's Word, however purely or ably set forth, produces no good effect except in honest and good hearts—in those *willing* to receive it. In all other cases, the Word will not profit on account of hindrances; which are, carelessness, want of perseverance, love of the world.

By the Tares mixed with wheat, we are taught that, until the Church is triumphant, evil will be ever mingled with the good. To disentangle this complication will be the work of God's angels. The Mustard seed shows us the rapid increase of Christ's Church.

From the Leaven influencing the meal, we see the alteration of habits and ideas caused by Christianity—the power wrought by the Gospel in the heart that receives it.

The Hidden Treasure and the precious Pearl give us an example of the conduct of him who realizes the treasures of Christ, the value of the soul. For the sake of them, he gives up every thing.

The Net cast into the Sea teaches us (as the Tares) concerning the existence of evil in the holy Church.

Such were the subjects of our Lord's teaching on the Lake of Gennesaret. The multitudes

having departed, Jesus appears to have landed[2], but being worn out by fatigue, and inconvenienced by a multitude again assembling, He directs His disciples to cross the Lake. A scribe, interested by His teaching, expressed a wish to follow Him; but his sincerity seemed doubtful, and he was dismissed[3]. Jesus then entered a ship with His disciples. As they were crossing the lake there arose a great tempest. In that frail bark was contained the most precious cargo ever shipped. The Saviour of the world and the twelve pillars of the Church! How great was their danger! The wind howled, the ship tossed, the waves beat over the ship. She was filled with water, ready to sink. So at the draught of fishes. Their great number threatened to sink the ship. The dissensions *within* the Church, the presence of evil and discord within, often endanger her existence. She experiences danger and distraction, but not destruction. Now it is danger from *without*, it is the tempest that threatens. The world from time to time attacks Christ's Church. The heathen furiously rage together, the people imagine a vain thing. The kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed.

[2] S. Matt. xiii. 36. [3] S. Matt. viii. 18—22.

Such attacks are sometimes too powerful for God's people to resist. How powerless were the disciples to battle against the storm! In their trouble they go to Jesus. Amid the roar of the storm, He is asleep, sleeping the sleep of God's beloved. Mark His manhood. See how really He took on Him our nature; how evidently He shows Himself to be very man. He knows from experience the need we have of repose and rest, and is at hand to comfort His servants when lying on the bed of sickness, distracted and wearied with the cares, the struggles, the sins, and follies of the world. And mark, too, the disciples' faith. It was real: for they cry out, "Lord, save us; we perish." They knew that "though the waves of the sea were mighty and raged horribly, yet the Lord Who dwelleth on high was mightier[4]." But this faith was small. Their Master reproached them. "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" They looked to Jesus for help; but thought that He was powerless when asleep. They trusted Him to a certain extent, but fixed a limit to His power. Thus we find their forefathers reasoning: "He smote the stony rock indeed, that the water gushed out, and the

[4] Ps. xciii. 5. In this and other places, Prayer Book Version.

streams flowed withal; but *can* He give bread also, or provide flesh for His people[5]? Surely, when external dangers threaten us, we might take comfort by reflecting that GOD knows them, that His power and love are unbounded; He counts the hairs of our head, and marks every tear and every groan. "He that keepeth Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps[6];" nay, rather, He sees the way to escape, and appreciates the glory of our deliverance. He knows, too, that these very tempests shall work together for good to them that love Him. He pities all our distresses, for "we have not an High Priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities[7]." Was it not so with the Apostles? Experiencing His merciful care in their deliverance, witnessing His dominion over the elements, their confidence in Him was strengthened, and they were ready to acknowledge, "Thou rulest the raging of the sea; Thou stillest the waves thereof when they arise[8];" for when the cry of distress was raised, "He rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm." "He maketh the storm to cease; so that the waves thereof are still[9]."

[5] Ps. lxxviii. 21.
[6] Ps. cxxi. 4.
[7] Heb. iv. 15.
[8] Ps. lxxxix. 10.
[9] Ps. cvii. 29.

In Christ sleeping we saw the man: in Christ stilling the Tempest, in exercising the authority so frequently attributed to the Most High, behold the God! If Moses controlled the sea with his rod [1], or if Elijah separated the waters of the Jordan [2], they worked these miracles only in dependence upon God. But, observe, *Jesus seeks help from none.* Self-reliant, self-sufficient, conscious of resistless might within, He commands, "Peace be still." The voice of Him that was heard in the beginning of Creation, commanding the light and elements to come into being, was obeyed. Not a murmuring ripple against His will was heard across that Lake, as peaceful calm pervaded the waters. No angry billow with sullen discontent dashed its ill-humour on the sacred shore. No, the calm of perfect obedience exercised its gentle magic even there; and, mirrored in the quiet waters, might again be seen the heavens declaring God's glory. Oh, dear brethren, that we so heeded the voice of the Son of God, that the tumults of pride and passion should at once subside in our hearts at His sweet command!

In many instances we may observe the *unselfishness* of our dear Lord. He never suffered His Divine power to free Him from the trials

[1] Exod. xiv. 21—27. [2] 2 Kings xi. 8.

to which men are subject. He hungers in the wilderness[3], He thirsts at Jacob's well[4]: and He bears it; no miracle is used to supply His wants.

So on the Lake. He might have prevented the storm; or used His foreknowledge with regard to it, and taken the voyage at a different time. But He rather suffers Himself to be tossed by the tempest and deprived of His repose, having taken no extraordinary precautions in the matter. The disciple is not above his Master. Obedience to God's commands, zeal in His service, the earnest love of the Redeemer, will not free us from those evils which the flesh is heir to. The beloved Lazarus must fall sick and die[5], the Baptist must perish by the executioner's axe[6], the disciples be threatened with a violent death. They were only obeying Christ's command. He had ordered the crossing, and their obedience brought trouble. But observe, that although by doing God's will we may incur danger and trouble, we are sure of the protection of Him whose will we are trying to perform. Christ may appear regardless of our troubles—may seem to be asleep; but if He is with us (and, my brethren, He always is

[3] S. Matt. iv. 2, 3.
[4] S. John iv. 6, 7.
[5] S. John xi. 14.
[6] S. Matt. xiv. 10.

with His faithful servants, as truly as with the disciples on the Lake), we are sure of being safe. Consider, further, if the Christian was exempt from trouble and sorrow, if dangers never beset his path, what room would there be for earnest faith, for humble waiting upon God?—what inducement to fervent prayer?—or how could he realize his own insufficiency or weakness. S. Paul seems at one time inclined to be exalted above measure; there was given to him a thorn in the flesh. Then came humility, and then trust in his Lord, Who said to him, "My grace is sufficient for thee, for My strength is made perfect in weakness[7]." And, indeed, benefits may be obtained from all evil. If there were no persons selfish, overbearing, hot-tempered, obstinate, or proud, how could we find an opportunity of exercising the graces of humility, gentleness, forbearance, and generosity? Let us then, brethren, not indeed court dangers, but not shrink from them when they come in the obvious path of duty. Let us seek to realize Christ's presence more than we do, so shall we find in our lives tokens of His power and love. On the man who comes to Christ, hears His sayings, and doeth them, the storms of the world, of unbelief, of unholy passions, beat in

[7] 2 Cor. xii. 7. 9.

vain [8]. For he serves One Whom even the winds and sea obey.

In the natural world the seasons differ. It is not always summer—the sky is not always clear. We see this is also true in the spiritual world. That violent opposition, to which the Saints in former times were exposed, does not trouble us. But there will be seasons of doubt, of temptation to love the world, to seek our own ease, to do our own will. Evil example will at times be unusually strong, aversion to our duty more intense. Occasions will arise when the sacrifice of principle will seem small, compared with the temporal gain; when the conduct of others seems to excuse us from our own duty. But, in all such times, let us only be sensible of our danger; and, turning to the Saviour, cry, "Lord, save us; we perish." Feel your weakness, know your peril, desire to do right, trust in Jesus, and you are safe. Your danger, your trial shall turn to your profit. "The rivers of the flood thereof shall make glad the city of God [9]." You shall feel the truth of the Psalmist's words:—"God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear, though the

[8] S. Matt. vii. 24, 25. [9] Ps. xlvi. 4.

earth be moved, and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof rage and swell, and though the mountains shake at the tempest of the same[1]."

[1] Ps. xlvi. 1—3.

III.

S. MATT. xiv. 22—33.
S. MARK vi. 45—51.
S. JOHN vi. 15—21.

In a desert, south of Bethsaida[1], JESUS fed five thousand men, besides women and children, with five barley loaves and two fishes. The table thus spread for them in the wilderness reminded the multitude of a similar miracle, performed in the early part of their national history. Under Moses, they had experienced a like proof of the Divine providence; for GOD gave them manna—angel's food—to eat[2]. Struck by the event, the multitude exclaimed: "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world." They were resolved to make JESUS a king: but His kingdom was not of this world. He withdrew Himself; and directed His Disciples to cross over to Bethsaida. Contrary winds prevented them from doing this; and they were driven out to sea, towards

[1] S. Luke ix. 10. [2] Exod. xvi. 13—15.

Capernaum. They were in vain toiling in their course: the violence of the wind prevented them from making much way. They thought, perhaps, that He was unmindful of their labour. But, though absent, He was conscious of their difficulties; as, on a former occasion, when He was present with them, but asleep. "He saw them toiling in rowing; for the wind was contrary unto them: and about the fourth watch of the night, He cometh unto them, walking upon the sea."

My brethren, however imminent our dangers may be, know this, that He observes the efforts of those toiling in His service.

And in the manner chosen by our SAVIOUR to visit His Disciples He showed marked consideration. Proposals had just been made to appoint Him king. He refused the honour; and deprived the Disciples of such an occasion of triumph. Instead of being chief ministers of a powerful king, they now found themselves in a position of hardship and danger; beaten by the storm; struggling hopelessly against a head wind. However, they do not complain: they accept their lot, and obey their Master, Who now shows them that His dignity was of a far higher kind than that with which the multitude would invest Him. He comes to

them, walking on the water—a proof of His Divinity. As it is written, "He treadeth upon the waves of the sea[3]."

The Disciples recognized something unearthly. Not yet understanding His true nature, that which should have given them joy fills them with fear. "When the Disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, "It is a Spirit; and they cried out with fear." Are none afraid when they lie awake at night? Why will some tremble as they pass a churchyard in the dark, or shudder with creeping flesh if they hear some idle tale of haunted places, as they choose to call them? It is sin, my brethren; it is the sting of the guilty conscience, giving the coward in this life some foretaste of the unutterable horrors of Hell. He knows that in daylight, amongst his evil companions, he despises God, and neglects His laws: now enveloped in darkness, he has no sense of the Divine protection, he feels near him that Prince of Darkness, whose servant he is, and against whose attacks he has no defence. But from such terrors God's servants are protected. How soon does Jesus dispel their fears! "Be of good cheer; it is I. Be not afraid."

[3] Job ix. 8.

The prominent feature of Peter's character is now displayed. He was ever inclined to presumption and self-confidence. Bitter was the lesson by which he was taught his own weakness. He now wishes, uncalled, to give a proof of faith: faith which was as yet very little, barely sufficient for his ordinary trials. "LORD, if it be Thou, bid me come unto Thee on the water. And He said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to JESUS. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, LORD, save me." The humble follower of CHRIST, though he never shrinks from obeying his Master, does not needlessly seek occasions which will require an extraordinary amount of faith and strength. When a man of his own accord places himself in a position of danger, he tempts God.

You will remember that such formed part of our Lord's temptation. The Devil placed Him on a pinnacle of the Temple, and told Him to cast Himself down, for God's holy angels would bear Him up[4]. Jesus refused: there was no occasion for such a wanton exposure to danger. "It is written," He answered, "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

[4] S. Matt. iv. 5, 6.

My brethren, God guarantees to each of His children that as their day is, so shall their strength be[5]; that from temptation He will provide a way to escape[6]: *i. e.*, each one of us may pray for and expect just that amount of grace which will preserve us from evil in that station of life and in those duties which God has appointed. But we are not promised, as I can find, any protection from those dangers which we seek out voluntarily for ourselves, whether for showing our superior spiritual strength, or for gratifying our lusts. Peter sees His Lord walking on the sea: he must show his faith and do the same. He tries it, and beginning to sink, cries, "Lord save me."

And here observe, what we have so often to notice, the gentleness, the forbearance, of the Lord Jesus. How tenderly He bears with the presumption, the pride, the weakness, the worldliness of His people! Oh, that we were as tolerant of one another's infirmities as He was! He does not leave Peter to the fate he had sought for himself. "Jesus stretched forth His hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" Until Peter doubted, he was safe, although he

[5] Deut. xxxiii. 25. [6] 1 Cor. x. 13.

was presumptuous. The Evangelist remarks, "He walked on the water, to go to Jesus." As long as he looked on his Master, desirous to go to Him, having no other care, he was safe. It is when he looks away, doubts whether the Power which has held him up, will support him still—it is when he takes his eyes off the Lord Jesus, that he begins to sink, loses all faith and strength.

My dear brethren, is not the lesson obvious? While our gaze is fixed on our Redeemer, our hearts desirous to go to Him—while we look on the Cross, longing to be drawn to Him Who hangs thereon—while our desires are on things above, our efforts after the prize of our high calling—we are safe. But if we look round at the difficulties that surround us, fear the roughness of the wind, the violence of the storm, become distracted with the cares of this life, feel that we cannot do our duty, then we are in danger—we begin to sink. But, as the holiest of God's servants have fallen, but been restored, let us be sure that however great our unbelief and our sin, yet Christ will ever listen to the earnest cry for help, "Lord, save me." "Let us ask in faith, nothing wavering[7]." He has

[7] James i. 6.

promised, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee: and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee[8]." "Call upon Me in the time of trouble, so will I hear thee, and thou shalt glorify Me[9]."

Peter, being thus preserved, returns to the ship, accompanied by his blessed Master, whose entry effected two results.

(1) "The wind ceased." No word of command was spoken: the Presence of Christ, invited by the helplessness and prayer of His disciples, destroyed the force of the wind, and banished all danger and trouble. Do I address any who have themselves experienced this? Perhaps there may be some who have led a life of care and trouble, both in their spiritual and temporal concerns. They have toiled apparently in vain: the wind has ever seemed contrary to them, forbidding their approach to that haven of peace where they would be. Worldly troubles have been their lot: sickness, poverty, hard times, have made life a very burden to them. Or they have been afflicted in their affections. As soon as their love was fixed on any object, it was removed. Or they have struggled against sin. They have known, understood, appreciated

[8] Isa. xliii. 2. [9] Ps. l. 15.

their duty, but not been able to perform it. They mourned, perhaps secretly shed bitter tears—tears seen and treasured by God—over the weakness of their flesh, the sinfulness of their hearts. They have loved their Redeemer, but feel that they have not served Him. They have been so weak, their hearts so full of evil thoughts even in the most sacred moments; their temptations have been so strong, their passions so violent. If any have so loved, toiled, and *failed*, I tell them that they shall not always fail. From the mountain of prayer Christ saw His disciples struggling in vain; and when they had been sufficiently tried, He went to them, entered their ship, and "the wind ceased." And so, from God's Right Hand, the place of Intercessory prayer, He sees the love, the failure, the labours, the misfortunes, the sins, the repentance, of His beloved members. Doubt it not: He is there beholding us, still praying in deep intercession. And He will visit us too: and, as we feel His presence, the wind will cease.

And then will follow that other (2) result:—"Immediately the ship was at the land whither they went." When Christ was with them, they were at their destination. My brethren, the object of the Christian man should be, not *to*

have, but *to be*. Possession will never satisfy man's longings. He must seek *to be—to be like God*[1]. To have the bands of union with our Lord strengthened and drawn closer, to have Christ with us, will cause our wills and characters to be assimilated with God's. When Christ dwells in our heart by faith, we are at the haven we seek. S. Paul teaches us this. Though he had nothing, yet he possessed all things[2]; though he was crucified, yet he lived. "Yet not I," he says, "but Christ liveth in me[3]". He assures his converts "all things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours: and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's[4]". Even so; when they received Christ into the ship, they were at the land whither they went.

[1] S. Matt. v. 48.
[2] 2 Cor. vi. 10.
[3] Gal. ii. 20.
[4] 1 Cor. iii. 21—23

IV.

S. Matt. xvii. 24—27.

Every part of creation was subject to the Saviour's power. The winds and storms heeded His voice. At His command the waters became calm, evil spirits left the bodies of the possessed, bread multiplied itself, strength came to the palsied limb, the spirit returned to the lifeless corpse. In the wilderness of temptation the wild beasts owned His control [1]; in His poverty, fish ministered to His necessities. This latter miracle was performed to enable Him to pay the tribute, an act of obedience related by S. Matthew alone.

And this shows us how naturally the Evangelists write. Matthew had been formerly engaged in the revenue [2]. He would view with professional interest our Lord's compliance with the law. So, in the Gospel of S. Luke the Physician, we find more minuteness in detailing

[1] S. Mark i. 13.

[2] S. Matt. ix. 9.

the diseases cured by Jesus. The Evangelists did not copy one from the other, but described events just as they would naturally strike the individual writer.

The tribute-money of the miracle was not, however, procured for a state tax or custom, but for a contribution to the Temple service. This was a charge on every man above the age of twenty. The amount was about 1*s.* 3*d.* Rich and poor were to pay alike, signifying the equality of all men in the sight of God. The Lord God charged the Israelites to make this payment as a ransom for their souls, if they would have no plague amongst them[3]. It was, in fact, much the same as our Church Rate.

Jesus and His disciples had come to Capernaum after the transfiguration and the healing of the lunatic. We have observed that Capernaum was the Lord's "own city[4]," *i. e.*, His home, and therefore the place where His name would be down among those liable to such payments. The collectors inquired of S. Peter, "Doth not your Master pay tribute? He saith, Yes. And when he was come into the house, Jesus prevented him, saying, What

[3] Exod. xxx. 12. [4] S. Matt. ix. 1.

thinkest thou, Simon? Of whom do the kings of the earth take custom or tribute—of their own children, or of strangers? Peter saith unto Him, of strangers. Jesus saith unto him, then are the children free." Jesus prevented him, *i. e.*, did not wait for Peter's question, but of His own accord spoke of what was passing in the Disciple's mind. For, though Jesus was not present at the moment, He had heard the conversation. No word, brethren, escapes His ears. Every word, however trivial, is heard by Him. He is conscious alike of the idle, the blasphemous, the unkind word, and of the prayers and hymns of His people. Even this ordinary conversation of the tribute-collector with Peter did not escape His notice. And He reads the heart, clearly, thoroughly. He needed not Peter's question. He knew what he would say, and answered his thoughts. Christian friends, how would it be if our thoughts were always answered and made known? Oh, let us pray and strive for a heart clean in God's sight, a heart that will bear His searching gaze; let us watch our thoughts—see that no thoughts of impurity, of sin, of shame, of rebellion, of doubt, of uncharitableness, are suffered to linger with us, perhaps to be *answered* and made known at the Great Day!

Now let us examine our Lord's reasoning. The kings of the earth, He observes, take tribute from strangers, but do not exact it from their own children. Now this payment was for the holy services of Almighty God, Whose express image [5], only-begotten and dearly-beloved Son, Jesus Christ was. To such a tax He could not be liable. But in small things, as well as great, Jesus was obedient, and accepted man's lot. "Notwithstanding, lest we should offend them, go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for Me and thee." Jesus pays this tribute in order to avoid giving offence, *i. e.*, causing others to offend, giving occasion to speak evil of Him, setting a bad example, causing disputes, leaving an impression that He did not care for the Temple services. Jesus is at Capernaum; Jerusalem, where the Temple was, many miles off; but for God's honour He is ready to contribute. Some Christian people think, that unless the object is near to them, they need not support it. The Jewish authorities were corrupt, not particularly honest, but

[5] Heb. i. 3.

Jesus pays the tribute readily. The Jewish teachers were carnally-minded and hypocritical, but Jesus attends the Temple services for all that.

My brethren, when you hear persons refusing to attend Church, or support Church objects; or when you are so tempted yourself, because you do not approve of your Clergy, dislike the Church system, have not a convenient seat, and so on; will you call to mind the example of your Saviour? Exempt, as the Son of God, from such payment, living under a corrupt priesthood, suffering from extreme poverty, He attends God's House of Prayer, and contributes to its support. And He did so on purpose that, having such an example, we should not offend; for where God's honour, God's service, and duty to God are concerned, we have nothing to do with private prejudices and preferences, likes or dislikes, however justly founded.

And the importance of this lesson strikes us still more, when we consider the manner in which Jesus obeyed. This is the only occasion on which He wrought a miracle for His own necessity. He will hunger in the wilderness rather than supply Himself miraculously with bread[6]. He will bear the blows of the soldiers,

[6] S. Matt. iv. 24.

rather than summon His Angelic Legions[7] to the rescue. But when His duty as a loyal and obedient Churchman (as we might say) is concerned, He considers the occasion of such importance as to warrant Him in using Divine Omniscience.

For the miracle appears to have consisted in His all-penetrating Eye perceiving that in the place where Peter would cast his hook was a fish, in whose mouth was a piece of money just sufficient for the tribute of Himself and His disciple. Instances of fishes swallowing valuables have been given, *e. g.*, an old Greek historian speaks of a signet-ring having thus been found.[8] Again we have to remark on the Omniscience of Jesus. Time, distance, size, are of no account in God's sight. His knowledge is over all His works; nothing is so minute as to escape His observation. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me: I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go, then, from Thy Spirit: or whither shall I go, then, from Thy presence? If I climb up unto Heaven, Thou art there; if I go down to Hell, Thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there also

[7] S. Matt. xxvi. 53. [8] Herodotus, iii. 41, 42.

shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me[9]." Strive, I pray you, to preserve a constant sense of God's presence with you; live, work, pray, and take your recreation, with a feeling that His eye is never off you, never ceases to mark your actions and your thoughts.

We have next to consider the poverty of Jesus, which made the Lake of Gennesaret the scene of such a miracle. The birds were better off for homes than He was[1]; the Son of Man was often without a place where to lay His head. On one occasion, two hundred pence appears to have been all the money He and His twelve disciples had amongst them[2]. On the present occasion He had not sufficient to pay the tribute. Might not that difficult—ah! so difficult!—lesson of contentment in poverty be more easily learnt, if we reflected on the outward condition of our great Master? He might have taken man's flesh in any rank of life. He chose the poorest. Dear brethren, do not doubt but that He knows the trials and sorrows of poverty, can appreciate the hard battle for life some of us have to wage: He sympathizes with all such woes. Nor may any de-

[9] Ps. cxxxix. 5—9. [1] S. Matt. viii. 20.
[2] S. John vi. 7.

spise the poor, and lightly esteem that condition of life which was honoured by the Son of God.

Another consideration. Many rich men, who have been earnest lovers of Christ, have constantly felt anxious whether they were using their opportunities well—whether they were, in their prosperity, more desirous to please God than to conform to the world. Success and affluence, whether arising from estates, business, or any other source, multiply a man's trials. Occasions are more frequently offered where the claims of the world become so urgent, that to perform one's duty to God requires a greater amount of self-denial and self-command than most men possess. It is true that, in such cases, they may obtain strength; but in such pressing emergencies one too often forgets to seek it. Men do not always remember, that the more urgent are the world's claims, the more they need the grace of God to make them still remember whose children they are, and whose conduct they should imitate. Now in a poor condition a man is in a great measure spared such temptations. There is little to lose, and little to gain. He has not been able much to satisfy his self-indulgence, or feel strongly the attractions of this world; consequently it is

easier for him to fix his affections on the world to come.

And observe, lastly, Peter's trust in Christ's promise. What could be a more hopeless task than to fish on the chance of finding a piece of money? Yet Peter did it, and got what was wanted. Learn, then, to seek Christ's help in the way He commands. Some persons often say, Sacraments and Church ordinances are needless, for Christ can save without them. Undoubtedly He *can*, but *will* He? I cannot think so. If Scripture and His Church (whose commands He has desired us to obey[3]) point out certain acts for us to do, it is not for us to question God's will, or dictate to Him how He is to save our souls. But we must not trust to these outward acts for salvation. They do not save of themselves. It is Christ's power, and God's grace, given in them as a reward for man's faithful obedience, shown in doing what he has been told.

Nor let any think that (to speak of temporal matters) God will give us health and provision without industry on our part. God has so ordered the world, that to obtain bodily or spiritual blessings we must use the appointed means.

[3] S. Matt. xviii. 17. 1 Tim. iii. 15.

Light, exercise, temperance, cleanliness, and fresh air, are ordained by Him for the preservation of our health; hard work will provide for the wants of the body. Christ could have created the money by a word. He did not. Peter is a fisherman; money is wanted. Let him, then, turn to his occupation, and work for it, trusting in God's blessing, and he shall obtain what is required.

It is for us to follow his example: in a cheerful, contented spirit, as Christian men and women, to work our hardest, whether we are masters or servants, in business or in professions; let us not think our task is too heavy, but know that God will help us. Our successful industry will not lead us to forget that the happy result is obtained through His favour preventing us in all our doings, and His help furthering us in our undertakings.

V.

S. JOHN xxi. 1—10.

IT is remarkable that our Saviour's last appearance by the Lake of Gennesaret should be under circumstances so like those of His first appearance there[1]. He has now suffered on the Cross, died, and risen again. He is only occasionally with His disciples; they are now learning to dispense with His visible presence; they must in their hearts recall His teaching, and see Him with the eye of faith.

For some reason, perhaps from poverty, perhaps for recreation, seven of them go fishing on the Lake. Again the night is passed in fruitless labour. As yet Christ's spiritual Presence was not a reality to them, and so labouring without Him "they caught nothing." In the morning light they see One on the shore, but do not recognize in Him their loved Master. He questions them, and they answer that they have

[1] See S. Luke v. 1—11.

no meat. Then comes the command, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find."

My brethren, these words concern *us*. Christ's teaching is not, observe, addressed to the multitude, but to *the disciples* toiling in the ship; in other words, to *the members of His Church*. And as this is the only advice given on this occasion, we must seek from it the causes of Christian men toiling for Christ and their own souls in vain. Mark well what the advice is. They are to cast on the *right* side. They are not to throw from the bow nor from the stern, nor from the left side. Only on the side pointed out by their Master would they find what they wanted. Let me ask those who are striving to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, and feel that their success is but small,—let me ask such persons whether they have followed this advice? whether they have obeyed Christ? It is not enough merely to cast the net, to take some trouble and pains in the matter: we must employ that labour as Christ has commanded, *we must cast on the right side*. Then we shall succeed.

This is true in Church work. Under the direction of the Holy Spirit, it has been determined from the very first ages that the ministry

of the Church should be threefold, consisting of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons; and that these should trace their descent from the Apostles, and thus derive their commission from the Lord Himself. When efforts have been made to evangelize a country with Missionaries not thus constituted, the results have been most unsatisfactory. Lately, these attempts have been made according to the Apostolic order. Both the Anglican and American Churches have endeavoured to evangelize countries by Missions consisting of Bishops, Priests, and Deacons. And though the members of such Missions may not have been more able or more earnest than those sent on other plans contrived by men, yet their success has been marvellous. Why? Because the net was cast on the right side. Again, we know what an amount of infidelity and heathenism we have to deal with in our own country. It is instructive to notice the methods by which this evil is most successfully grappled with. Efforts of all kinds have been made. Theatres and such places have been chosen, in which attractive services might be held by ministers of all denominations. Little permanent good has thus been effected. But where a Mission has been planted which has carried out the Church's order in its complete-

ness, success has followed, in every case with which I am acquainted; simply because the net was cast on the right side.

We have heard of the coldness and irreligion which characterized the last century. What caused it? Those Catholic principles and Apostolic order revived at the Reformation had become neglected through the prevailing ignorance and indolence. The Sacraments, the Apostolic rite of Confirmation, and other Church Ordinances, were but seldom administered; religious works languished; the people were hardly ever called on to support them with their alms. No wonder if spiritual life became feeble, when the appointed means for sustaining it were neglected; no wonder if persons undervalued religion, when they were not called upon to make any sacrifices for it. In our own time we see increased religious activity, noble instances of real self-denial for Christ, and these evinced chiefly in those parishes where the net is cast on the right side. In such places the whole Gospel is preached, the entire Church system carried out. Men are told that if they neglect the Sacraments and Ordinances ordained by Christ, they have no well-founded hope of inward grace; that it is impossible to have either faith or obedience if they leave the appointed path, and seek for grace

in their own way; that these Sacraments and Ordinances are not only useless but absolutely dangerous to those who use them without Repentance, Faith, and Charity. They are warned, moreover, that their worship must be a pure and hearty worship; that if they are indeed worshipping in the secret depths of their spirit, and in truth, they will not be satisfied to see wealth, taste, comfort, beauty, and refinement prevailing every where *except* in the places dedicated to God; that where thorough deep devotion exists in the heart, some outward sign of it will appear, some light of it shine before men.

And where the net is thus cast on the side pointed out by the Master and the Church, acting as His representative, what follows? Success. The fishermen are not able to draw the net for the multitude of fishes. Souls are drawn to Christ, the number of the saved is increased.

And now to apply this teaching to individuals. Perhaps I address some who have been toiling for salvation, but seem to have caught nothing. Have you been toiling aright? Have you cast the net on the right side? A few simple instances will illustrate my meaning. Has pressure of business, the prospect of worldly success, been a hindrance to your devotion?

All through the New Testament you are taught, by precept and example, that without self-denial[2] you cannot be Christ's disciple. Do you believe this *as a matter of practice?* or is your toiling confined to mere outward profession, to reading and hearing sermons and religious books, to having on your tongue religious phrases and pious expressions, while the heart has remained unconverted, the love of self as strong as ever? Oh, if such be the case, you have toiled in vain, you have not cast on the right side.

Again, have you felt that when you were prosperous, healthy, active, surrounded with blessings, then was the time to work out your own salvation? or have you at such times felt "now is the time to serve the world, to increase earthly treasure, to please myself"? In such a case the net has not been cast on the right side. You may have toiled, but you have toiled wrong.

Once more, certain opportunities are given you of worshipping your Maker, obtaining pardon and help. What account have you to give of these? Have they been used, neglected, or abused? I know many will say, "I can pray at home and read sermons at home." But what

[2] S. Matt. xvi. 24.

does God's Word teach on this point? It teaches you that almost from the beginning of time, places and seasons have been set apart for public worship; it shows you the example of the Lord and His Apostles in this matter. How dares any one to set his private opinion in opposition to God's Word; where is the humble, teachable spirit, when any one chooses for himself a line of conduct sanctioned neither by the Scriptures nor the example of God's Saints? It is the good disposition that is needed, which would rather do too much than risk by neglect some loss of God's favour. Not one of you can enter into the Kingdom of Heaven without labour and self-denial, and those rightly employed.

Next observe the consequences of the disciples' obedience. So full became their net, that they could hardly draw it. Oh, dear brethren, strive to obey Christ, and you shall not only be enlightened as to doctrine [3], but shall obtain God's blessing more abundantly than you either desire or deserve.

Now for the consequences of the miracle. "That disciple whom Jesus loved saith unto Peter, It is the Lord." The reward of obedience

[3] S. John vii. 17.

brought further blessing. It opened the eye of faith: it enabled them to discern Christ's presence. Would that such was the case with us. When we have prospered, let down our nets with success, do we not often forget to whom we are indebted? In all times of our wealth, in all times of prosperity and happiness, may we recognize God as the Author and Giver of it all, and say in our innermost hearts, "It is the Lord." So shall we be ready with Peter to hasten to Him, eager to meet Him in glad service and cheerful self-sacrifice, attracted more and more to His arms as our worldly happiness is blessed.

Let us now see how the second draught of fishes completes the teaching of the first draught, with which miracle these discourses commenced. On the first occasion we do not find that Christ observed the fruitless labour of the night at all. This shows us the struggles of the old world after truth, the efforts for salvation of the people who sat in darkness and in the shadow of death. The night passes away, the Sun of Righteousness arises with healing on His wings. In that time of universal peace, when internal tumults were suppressed by the strong government of the Roman, when men were in a state of expectancy, dissatisfied with heathen superstition and Pagan

rites, the Day-spring from on High poured its light on darkened minds. Christ came; the Ship now goes out to fish for souls, under His authority. The Net now encloses a great multitude of fishes; "the Kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it[4]." In a very few years the sound of the great company of preachers had gone out into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world. Until sin and error are destroyed, the Church on earth, though one with the Church in Heaven, is imperfect. The breaking net, the sinking ship, illustrate the dangers to which the Church is exposed from her very numbers. Tares are ever mixed with the wheat, evil with the good; in every age and every branch of the Church progress is checked by the lukewarm, the indifferent, the unfaithful, the empty professor.

But turn to the second miracle, and see the completion of Christ's teaching. The Resurrection is over, the period of Ascension at hand. On the beach stands the Lord Jesus; it is His second Advent. The Church is directed to make for the shore, the Haven where we would be. In the disciples dragging the net, see the last dire struggle, the agony and horrors of the

[4] S. Luke xvi. 16.

valley of the Shadow of Death! "Bring of the fish which ye have now caught," is the command. We shall be rewarded according to our works[5]. And very justly too. For Christ has pointed out to us how and where to cast our nets; in every case of obedience He has quickened our faith and made His Presence more realized by us. If, then, we have disregarded His teaching and quenched the movings of His blessed Spirit, most righteously shall we be excluded from that banquet for the weary, the wedding-feast prepared on the beach; most righteously shall we be excluded from the Realms lighted by His Presence, and left to the power of the storms raised by Satan and our own passions, left to cast in vain for salvation, left to toil fruitlessly for admission to those blissful shores "Where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest[6]."

[5] Rom. ii. 6. Rev. xx. 12, 13. [6] Job iii. 17.

VI.

S. JOHN xxi. 15—19.

ON the last day of His life, Jesus said, "After I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee[1]." On Easter morning, the Angel at the Sepulchre sent this message: "Tell His Disciples and Peter that He goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see Him, as He said unto you[2]." Rude and uncouth as were the Galileans, they had, on the whole, received the Saviour much better than the more cultivated inhabitants of Jerusalem; and it is one of the lesser proofs of our Lord's Humanity to see in Him this force of association. His sufferings over, His victory accomplished, He quits insolent Jerusalem, hastens to Galilee, and there seeks the Lake of Gennesaret, which had ministered to Him and brought tribute, which had obeyed His Voice, and given occasion to many parables.

[1] S. Matt. xxvi. 32. [2] S. Mark xvi. 7.

And who has not felt this power of association? who has revisited after, it may be, years of sorrow and suffering, old familiar spots, and seen the well-remembered objects—people engaged just as they were years ago, the winds murmuring out the same sighs as they fitfully stir the foliage, the birds raising the same eternal chant to their Maker, the sea rendering the same tuneful chords as its waves roll hither and thither—who can be thus placed without being stirred at heart? Events long past crowd on the memory: with sad reflection we recall early hopes unfulfilled, early opportunities neglected: life has been so sad, so different to what we expected.

Some such thoughts may have crossed the minds of the actors in the scene already described. The kingdom had not been restored to Israel; it had not been redeemed; and where were their thrones of judgment, their places of honour in the kingdom of Christ[3]? And the Saviour? Across His Human Heart may have passed pleasing memories and anxious forebodings. Outwardly the scene was the same; but how different the spectators! The fight had been fought, the victory won! Henceforth

[3] S. Matt. xix. 28.

He should be a stranger to suffering, save through His Sympathy with His people: for weal or woe, gifts had been procured for men; the gates of Life been opened,—Life, whether of joy or sorrow, that should never cease!

Here then was the place where the Lord performed His last miracle. And in the scene which followed, so unspeakably touching and solemn, we have Christ's last injunction to His Church, which must find a place in the depths of all earnest Christian hearts. The miracle, which we have already discussed, is over. The Apostles had brought their fish to land, and there partaken of food prepared by the Divine Hands of their Master. The number of the saved has been reckoned a hundred and fifty-three[4]. How few are chosen! The Church is now triumphant; there is no sin, no discord; love, the mark of discipleship, prevails[5]; for all there were so many, *yet was not the net broken*[6]." Is not the scene with its wondrous significance almost awful?

Having finished the meal, Jesus issues His last command; and to Peter, rash in profession, weak in action, it is to be addressed. Here mark, I pray you, how the Lord not only sees

[4] S. Mark xvi. 11. [5] S. John xiii. 35. [6] ver. 11.

and knows every action and every thought, but also in his Book of Remembrance recalls the past: every particular, slight and venial as it may have seemed to us, is recorded with unerring accuracy. The evil word; the shrinking from some small act of duty; the neglect of God, when busy, or anxious, or indisposed; the turning away from opportunities of serving and obeying Him—all these, beloved in Christ, are noted and remembered, as well as those notorious sins which we avoid.

Peter had been profuse in his expressions of loyalty. Others might forsake Jesus; he never would. He was stronger, more earnest, more loving than his brethren: he would follow his Master to prison and death. And at the first trial he denies his Lord. While the snares of death compassed his Master, while the blows fell upon His innocent and marred Face, Peter declares, with oaths, "I know not the Man!" Peter must go into Galilee; and there, at the scene of his early call to the Ministry[7], the scene of former boasting and failure[8], must make his peace with God.

The shores which had heard his first summons, near the ship associated with miracle,

[7] S. Luke v. 10. [8] S. Matt. xiv. 30.

parable, and type, must witness his Apostolic commission renewed, his restoration effected. "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou Me more than these?" These, thy brethren, the sons of Zebedee and others, they love Me: do you still think that you love Me more than these do? Do you still boast that you are more faithful, more loyal, more stedfast than these? Peter's reply is humble. "Yea, Lord; Thou knowest that I love Thee." I make no professions. I do love; whether more than others I say not. Try me, and seek the ground of my heart; increase my love, and give me strength. Three times the Apostle had denied; three times he has to make the modest declaration that he loved his Lord; but with no protestations of what he would do, and how nobly he would act. Each time he hears the same command: "Feed My sheep; feed My lambs." And how, brethren, do all the other Gospels conclude? In St. Matthew we hear the order, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations," or make disciples, *i. e.* Christians of all nations; in S. Mark, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature;" in S. Luke, "Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem."

Man's gratitude, then, to his Crucified Redeemer, his duty to his Risen and Glorified God, are to be shown by extending Christ's flock and ministering to their necessity. Can our belief in the Atonement be real, when we neither accept our responsibilities nor acknowledge our duty? Such neglect, remember, constituted the great sin of the Jewish people: "The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost[9]." My brethren, you may feel that you have in your lives constantly denied Christ. You think perhaps that you have repented. What is the work meet for repentance which Christ enjoins? "Feed My sheep." "Tell it out among the heathen that the Lord is King[1]." But among professedly religious people, what points awaken the most zeal, the most self-denial? Questions of party. Religious activity is shown in points of ritual, and matters of deep and solemn doctrine. The very Sacraments which ought to be the signs of the love that Christians should have one to another, are

[9] Ezek. xxxiv. 4. [1] Ps. xcvi. 10.

too often matters of the bitterest strife and contention.

Meetings and organizations for party purposes are supported with spirit and earnestness of purpose. To promote or oppose some system of worship, peculiar for excess or defect, gold is freely given. But who can remember meetings for Missionary purposes being supported with animation and abundant liberality? Tell a person of some innovations in his neighbourhood, either in extreme or defective ritual, and his spirit is roused: *he* is on the Lord's side: to promote or oppose the matter he is ready for self-sacrifice. Tell him of nations sitting in darkness, of English colonists deprived of the means of grace, and his interest flags at once: he may perhaps spare a small piece of silver.

Now, as persons of learning and ability appear able to prove to the satisfaction of many intelligent people, that the views of either party are correct; it follows that there are depths of doctrine and secrets in God's counsels, on which at present there is not full light, which the human intellect cannot grasp, nor human language precisely define: on many points we are left in some uncertainty. It is remarkable how little the Church of the Apostles was troubled with

such questions. Only one Council[2] was held on Circumcision and Jewish customs, and that was settled in a spirit of compromise and forbearance. And one of the most hopeful signs of the present day is to be gathered from the fact that Missionary effort was the principal subject of the recent Conference of Bishops at Lambeth.

But men appear too often to think that compromise and forbearance are unchristian in matters especially interesting to themselves. But why was the Apostolic Church thus comparatively free from internal dissensions? Because she was busily occupied in feeding Christ's sheep. Let me ask religious people to fear the deceitfulness of their own hearts. Zeal for some party may, alas! exist without any real zeal for God, for the spreading of His Kingdom. And on this point our Divine Master gives no uncertain sound—"Make Christians of all nations," "Feed My sheep:" what room here for doubt and lukewarmness?

May I ask those who have not realized this duty, so plain, so decided, to be convinced of sin and to repent? Let the time, the talent, the money hitherto spent in fostering *strife* in the

[2] Acts xv.

Church, be now devoted to her *growth*, the *advancement* of the kingdom of our Lord. By obeying the direct, plain commands of our Saviour, we shall obtain His promise, and "know of the doctrine[3]."

And to those who have failed in their lives and conversations to confess Christ before men, and now seek true repentance, I would point out the same lesson. Do not talk of your past sin, do not obtrude your conversation on others, but strive to *obey* Christ. If you really love Him, *keep His commandments*, at the cost of your own ease. Be self-denying, not only in worldly comfort, *but in your religious habits and feelings also*. If His grace has been so freely given as to have brought you to repentance, freely distribute it. Feed Christ's sheep. You may not be called to, nor be fit for, active ministerial work; but by self-denial, prayers, and sympathy, you may strengthen the hands of those so engaged. Peter found that to obey his Master would cost much exertion and self-sacrifice. He must be even prepared for death. "When thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not," even to crucifixion and death.

[3] S. John vii. 17.

And lastly, we may reflect how true is this of others as well as Peter. When helpless old age comes on us, we are in the hands of others. The failing sight, the tottering limbs, the weakened intellect, the clouded memory, these deprive us of the power of going where we would, and doing what we would. We are in the hands of others: our old comrades have dropt off one by one, and left us to the care of a younger generation, who may think us an incumbrance, and would not regret our departure. And to what can the old man turn with comfort, whence gain consolation, unless he knows that when he was young, able to gird himself and walk where he pleased, his way was God's way, and the path of His commandments? For if in the days of health and vigour he was ensnared by the Evil One, and carried away with his own lusts, surely in the days of age he will find those enemies now too strong for him. He may wish to pause, and cease to cherish in his heart the sins he is now powerless to commit; but his enemies, the Devil and his own unbridled passions, will gird him and carry him whither he would not,—to infidelity, to despair, to the pit of destruction!

Be it ours, brethren, so to follow the leadings of God's Holy Spirit, that when we are

old we may be still subject to His gentle influence, and led by Him to one of those "many mansions" which the Lord Jesus Christ has prepared for His Beloved!

THE END.

GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, PRINTERS, ST. JOHN'S SQUARE, LONDON.